



PINPOINT



Teachers can use knowledge structures systematically to teach the language of content, language through content, and content knowledge.

Michael Lewis

What is a lexical approach?

It's based on Michael Lewis' 1993 book *The Lexical Approach*. He claims a focus on vocabulary building should come before learning grammar.

When students have a set of words that makes sense to them, they are motivated and equipped to communicate about them. They are then ready to weave grammar naturally around their explanations.



Linguists say that all languages are shaped around clusters of related words.

Baddeley

How do language teachers use it?

Bernie Mohan in Canada has built methods and curricula based on the lexical approach. He has identified 6 main types of word clusters he calls knowledge frameworks. What's more he says all subjects and texts are built around them.

He makes them visible through the use of visual tools. Showing students the shape of information helps to:

- link to past learning
- create rapid understanding
- hook to long term memory
- shape discourse.

Research by Tang shows this to be true in other languages too.



Word clusters prompt dialogue and promote the development of grammar and thinking skills.

Baddeley

Does it only apply to language teaching?

No. All subjects are language-based. But the usual way for students to gain access to them is through mastering grammar. This wall of syntax is often the greatest barrier to learning.

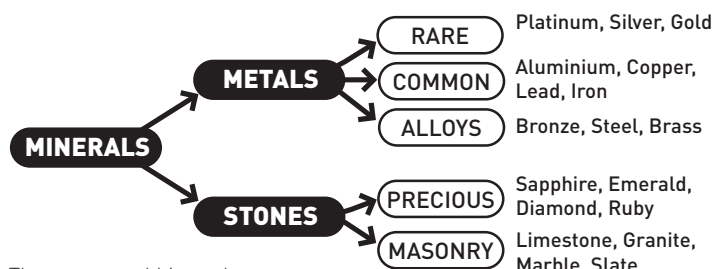
Vocabulary clusters and memory

The psychologist Mander found that when participants in a test simply grouped 100 words into clusters that 'went together', they recalled as many words as other participants trying to commit single words to memory.

How is this related to learning?

According to memory expert Baddeley (1995), the secret of good memory is like that for good learning, which "typically goes with the systematic encoding of incoming material, integrating and relating it to what is already known".

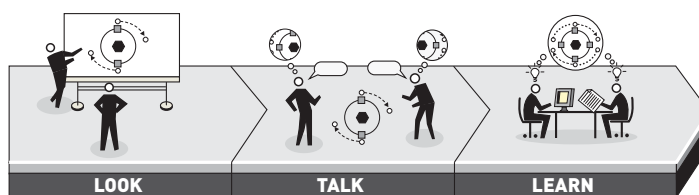
This explains why psychologists represent memory and understanding in this lexical construction.



The conceptual hierarchy model by Bower

How can you apply this in your classrooms?

Make sure you present the curriculum through both syntax and visual lexical clusters. Explain core meanings first and let your students discuss them by using the visual tools as a speaking and listening framework. Show them how to develop the visual tool as a result of their learning. Use this rehearsal of understanding as part of their planning for writing.



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